DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 347 CS 510 955

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TITLE Descriptive Study of AmeriCorps Literacy Programs: State and National. Final Report.
INSTITUTION Abt Associates, Inc., Cambridge, MA.
SPONS AGENCY Bosma and Associates International, Seattle, WA.
PUB DATE 1999-11-29
NOTE 57p.; The survey instrument, Appendix B, is not included in the downloaded version, and is not available from ERIC.
CONTRACT 97-743-1004
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.americorps.org/research.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Literacy; Program Descriptions; *Program Evaluation; *Reading Skills; *Tutoring
IDENTIFIERS Administrator Surveys; *AmeriCorps; Corporation for National Service; Descriptive Research

ABSTRACT

AmeriCorps is composed of three programs, State and National; National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC); and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). The focus of this report is on the AmeriCorps State/National program. Education-related activities have been a priority for AmeriCorps' parent organization, the National Corporation for Public Service, since its inception. To inform staff, programs, Congress, and other stakeholders about its literacy activities, the Corporation contracted with Abt Associates to conduct an independent descriptive study. Abt Associates surveyed 517 directors of AmeriCorps programs engaged in literacy services--of these, 481 responded for a response rate of 93%. Findings include: slightly more than half of all programs are involved in education (54%); 42% of programs provide literacy services (n=406); 37% of programs provide direct tutoring in reading (n=360); 5% of program provide literacy-related activities such as reading aloud to children (n=46); most AmeriCorps State/National educational programs provide literacy services (84%); and of those programs conducting literacy services, most conduct tutoring activities in reading (89%). The report is divided into these chapters: (1) Background; (2) Description of the AmeriCorps Educational State/National Literacy Programs; (3) Structure of Literacy Programs; and (4) Tutoring Activities and Effective Practices. Contains numerous exhibits of data. Appended are a description of the survey design and implementation; and selected analyses for the complete respondent sample. (NKA)

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Descriptive Study of AmeriCorps Literacy Programs: State and National Final Report

November 29, 1999

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Executive Summary

This executive summary highlights findings from the report of the *Descriptive Study of AmeriCorps Literacy Programs: State and National*.[1] The summary begins with an introduction describing the activities of the Corporation for National Service, particularly those focused on literacy and education, followed by a discussion of the study design. The last section presents the key findings.

Introduction

- The Corporation for National Service (the Corporation) is a public corporation established by the National and Community Service Act in 1993. The Corporation's mission is to engage Americans of all ages and backgrounds in community-based national service intended to address the following four issue areas of need: education, public safety, human needs, and the environment. Funding is provided through three major programmatic streams: AmeriCorps; Learn and Serve America; and the National Senior Service Corps. Examples of service projects include:

- tutoring disadvantaged students;
- organizing neighborhood crime watches;
- converting vacant lots into neighborhood parks;
- leading community health awareness campaigns; and
- operating food banks.

AmeriCorps is composed of three programs, State and National; National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). The focus of this report is on the AmeriCorps*State/National program, which currently involves 35,000 members nationwide in 961 programs. State/National programs are operated through State Commissions and National service organizations. They support a national network of community-based programs providing opportunities for participants, referred to as "members," to engage in community service. In exchange for a year of full-time service, AmeriCorps members each receive a stipend and earn an education award that may be used to pay for higher education or to help pay back existing student loans. Members serving part-time receive pro-rated stipends and educational awards. Some members receive the education award and do not receive a stipend.

[1] For this Report, 'AmeriCorps programs' *refers only to AmeriCorps*State/National programs.*

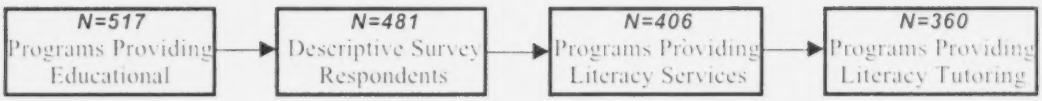
Education-related activities have been a priority for the Corporation since its inception. Indeed, education programs comprise the largest single area of service (of the four issue areas of need) as well as a significant portion of the Corporation's funding. Most recently, the Corporation has directed substantial resources toward the national issue of children's reading performance. This focus supports an important national mandate, as articulated in the America Reads initiative: *to help ensure that every child can read well and independently by the end of the third grade*. Toward this end, the Corporation has encouraged its programs to provide literacy services to young readers. Members offer these services through a variety of strategies, including tutoring, mentoring, volunteering as classroom assistants, and other literacy-related activities (e.g., conducting trips to the library or organizing book distributions). Clearly, such literacy activities represent a major investment of Corporation resources.

Study Design and Purpose

To inform staff, programs, Congress and other stakeholders about its literacy activities, the Corporation contracted with Abt Associates to conduct an independent *Descriptive Study of AmeriCorps Literacy Programs: State and National*. The objectives of the Descriptive Study are to:

- describe AmeriCorps*State/National programs that conduct educational activities in terms of their programmatic structures and the literacy and tutoring activities they have implemented;
- identify programs using effective reading literacy instructional models likely to improve children's reading abilities;
- describe the target population receiving services; and
- furnish descriptive and demographic information needed to design a future study of the impact of literacy activities on children's reading skills. These programs would then be included in the second component of the Evaluation, the *Outcome Evaluation of Literacy and Tutoring Programs*.

To meet these objectives, Abt Associates designed a survey which was administered in spring 1999. The survey was sent to the 517 directors of AmeriCorps*State/National programs who had reported that their programs are engaged in the provision of educational and literacy services. The survey collected information about: 1) the sponsoring agencies supporting the programs; 2) the AmeriCorps*State/National programs conducting educational and literacy activities; 3) the population receiving services; and 4) the structures and operations of their programs' literacy component.



Of the 517 project directors, 481 completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 93 percent. The information from these surveys serves as the basis for the results presented below. While 481 individuals completed the survey, a smaller number, 406, indicated that their programs conduct literacy activities.

Given the substantive focus of the study on literacy, our discussion throughout this report is based upon information from this smaller set of programs (406); the report also examines more specifically the subset of 360 programs that engage in tutoring in reading. Information about the complete sample of 481 programs is presented in Appendix C.

Major Findings

Below, we present the highlights in the major substantive areas addressed in the *Descriptive Study*.

Sponsoring Agencies

- The majority of agencies sponsoring AmeriCorps State*/National literacy programs (83 percent) have been operating for five or more years.
- Most often, the sponsoring agencies are community-based organizations (61 percent) or secondarily, educational institutions (29 percent).
- The sponsoring agencies report education as a primary focus of their mission and are experienced providers of educational services, particularly to children. The majority had provided literacy services to their communities prior to the 1998-99 program year.

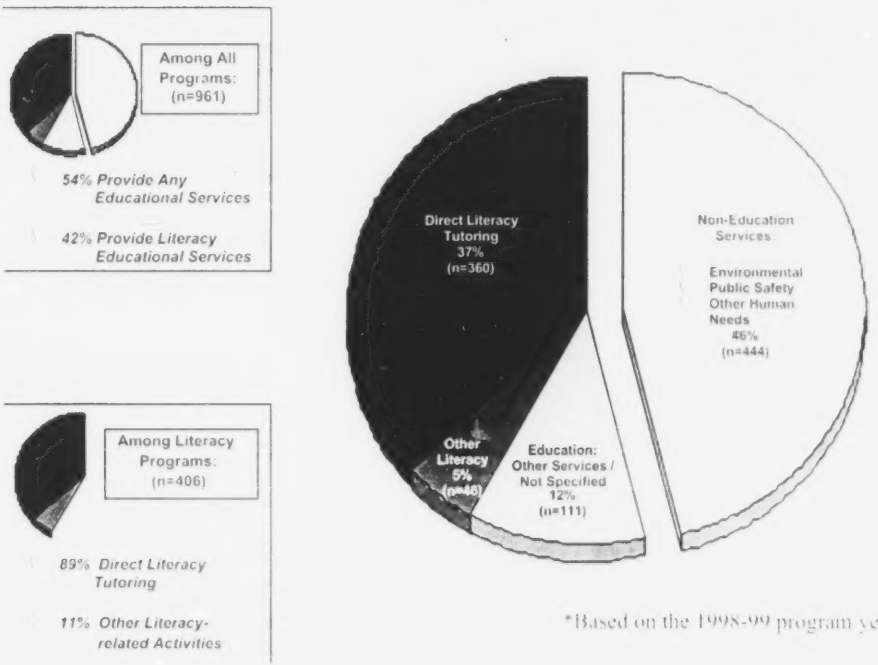
AmeriCorps*State/National Programs

The findings presented below are displayed in Exhibit E.1.

- Slightly more than half of all programs (54 percent) are involved in education.
- Forty-two percent of all programs provide literacy services (n=406).
- Thirty-seven percent of all programs provide direct tutoring in reading (n=360).

- Five percent of all programs provide literacy-related activities such as reading aloud to children or organizing trips to the library (N=46).
- Most AmeriCorps*State/National educational programs provide literacy services (84 percent).
- Of those programs conducting literacy services, most conduct tutoring activities in reading (89 percent).

Exhibit E.1 Frequency of Educational and Literacy Services in AmeriCorps*State/National Programs* (n=961)



*Based on the 1998-99 program year.

Resources

Funding

- Two-thirds of the literacy programs receive funding from at least one other Corporation source (e.g., America Reads, AmeriCorps Education Award, AmeriCorps Vista) in addition to their AmeriCorps*State/National grants.
- Some programs (17 percent) use members and volunteers who are funded through the Federal Work Study Program.

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Literacy providers

- Literacy services offered by programs are substantial: nationwide, over 10,000 members and 40,000 volunteers (recruited by members) provide literacy services.

- The literacy programs typically have fewer than 20 members providing services; only nine percent have 50 or more members conducting literacy activities.

- The majority of members (93 percent) and volunteers (80 percent) are high school graduates. Three-quarters of the members and half of the volunteers have participated in some postsecondary education.

Recipients of Literacy Services

- Approximately 260,000 individuals receive the literacy services offered by AmeriCorps*State/National programs. Ninety-percent (235,000) of these recipients are children.

- AmeriCorps*State/National programs typically provide literacy services to large numbers of students: most programs (76 percent) provide services to over 100 students.

- Literacy services are provided to the full spectrum of learners, from infants toddlers, to elementary and high school students, to families and other adult learners. However, across all programs nationwide, the majority of students receiving literacy services are concentrated in grades 1 through 6.

- Nationwide, two-thirds of the recipients of literacy services are African-American or Hispanic.

Literacy Program Structures

- The primary goals of virtually all of the literacy programs are to improve: 1) students' overall academic achievement, 2) motivation for reading and 3) reading comprehension skills. The majority of programs (56 percent) also strive to increase parents' involvement in their children's reading.

- Almost all literacy programs provide some training to members and volunteers in literacy instruction and in working with children. Typically, about 16 hours of training are provided before and 20 hours are provided during the delivery of literacy services. Training is provided by a combination of staff from the sponsoring agency, the AmeriCorps program, the school district, and or outside experts.

- Most programs provide literacy services in two broad areas: 1) *direct reading instruction* (e.g., tutoring in reading, classroom and homework assistance, and reading to children); and 2) *support for instructional activities* (e.g., developing and organizing instructional materials, recruiting volunteers).

- Three-quarters of the programs conduct formal evaluations to assess the effectiveness of their literacy activities.

- Literacy programs engaged in direct tutoring of reading are more likely to conduct formal evaluations than are programs with no tutoring component (78 percent vs. 50 percent).

Tutoring Activities

Tutoring activities are of particular interest since they are aimed directly at improving children's reading abilities. The *Descriptive Survey*, consequently, collected detailed information about the nature and potential effectiveness of these activities. The findings summarized below are based on the responses of the 360 AmeriCorps*State/National programs providing literacy tutoring.

- Tutors engage in a wide range of activities with their students; these activities encompass the full range of reading subskills (e.g., reading aloud, reading comprehension, vocabulary development, reading fluency, decoding).

- Over half (55 percent) of the tutoring programs report that tutors conduct decoding activities with students (i.e., activities that help beginning readers develop sound-symbol correspondences).

- Most of the tutoring programs incorporate some of the structural and instructional features perceived by educators and researchers as important for positive reading outcomes.[2] The features reported most frequently include:
    - coordination of tutoring activities with the classroom curriculum;
    - adequate intensity of tutoring activities— meeting at least twice weekly for at least 1.5 hours/week; and
    - provision of training to members and volunteer tutors before and during service delivery in two important content areas: 1) reading and tutoring children; and 2) child development.[3]

- Almost half of the tutoring programs use well-known, widely-used instructional models (e.g., Reading Recovery, Reading One-to-One, Success for All).

- Programs sponsored by colleges and universities are slightly more likely to report use of effective tutoring practices, on average, than are programs under other sponsorship.

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[2] These features include: 1) coordinating with classroom instruction; 2) tutoring on more than two occasions during the week; 3) conducting formal evaluations; 4) convening for a total of at least 1.5 hours weekly; 5) providing pre- and in-service training; 6) use of 'brand-name materials'; 7) involving a reading specialist in planning literacy activities; and 8) using a stable one-to-one tutoring model.

[3] The survey collected information about types and amounts of training; however, we have no information about the quality of these trainings, a critical element of effective training.

- Programs utilizing members supported by Federal Work Study (FWS) funds, on average, use more effective tutoring practices than do programs not using members supported by FWS.

- Programs receiving America Reads funds, on average, use more effective tutoring techniques than programs not receiving these funds.

- More fully-implemented programs use more effective tutoring techniques than partially implemented programs.

The findings about tutoring activities described above suggest that the Corporation_s efforts to encourage programs to develop and implement effective tutoring programs appear to be meeting with some success. The use of effective tutoring practices appears to be fairly widespread across programs.[4] The programs' intentions about effective tutoring activities align well with what is known in the research. This is an important preliminary finding about the potential effects of these tutoring programs on children's reading abilities.

[4] Since this finding is based on program directors' perceptions about implementation of activities, it may well reflect the 'intended' rather than the 'actual' nature of services. As a result, this finding should be interpreted with considerable caution.

Chapter One
Background

This chapter begins with a brief description of the programs funded by the Corporation for National Service, including the AmeriCorps*State/National programs, which are the focus of the study. Next, in order to provide a context for the study, a discussion of federal initiatives in education and literacy is presented, followed by a description of the study and the organization for this report.

The Corporation for National Service

The Corporation for National Service (the Corporation) is a public corporation established by the National and Community Service Act in 1993. The Corporation's mission is to engage Americans of all ages and backgrounds in community-based national service in four critical issue areas of need: education, public safety, human needs, and the environment, and further, to achieve clearly demonstrable results through such community service.

The Corporation's programs and public-private partnerships involve national and community-based service organizations, corporations, foundations, colleges, universities, K-12 schools, and state and municipal governments. Funding is provided through three major programmatic streams: AmeriCorps; Learn and Serve America; and the National Senior Service Corps.

AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps is the national service initiative that supports a national network of community-based programs open to all American citizens 17 years or older. As part of the national service network, local AmeriCorps programs strive to meet the following goals:

- *Getting Things Done*: Help solve community problems in the service areas of education, public safety, the environment, and other human needs;
- *Strengthening Communities*: Work in cooperation with other community members and institutions to solve local problems;
- *Encouraging Responsibility*: Enable members to become problem-solving, responsible leaders through service and civic education; and
- *Expanding Opportunity*: Provide members with professional skills and experience; and help to make further education and/or job training more accessible.

AmeriCorps is composed of three programs:

- **AmeriCorps*State/National Programs** are national and community service programs operated by community-based educational institutions and other non-profit organizations. Currently, there are approximately 35,000 members serving in 996 programs.[1] *AmeriCorps*State/National programs are the focus of this study.*

- **The National Civilian Community Corps** (NCCC) is a ten-month, full-time, residential service program for individuals between the ages of 18-24. Currently, there are approximately 1,100 members across five regional NCCC campuses.

- **Volunteers in Service to America** (VISTA) is a national service program that places individuals in disadvantaged communities to support infrastructure; it is intended to help residents become more self-sufficient. Currently, approximately 3,200 VISTA members serve in 930 programs.[2]

AmeriCorps*State/National Programs

The AmeriCorps*State/National program provides opportunities for participants, referred to as "members," to engage in community service. In exchange for a year of full-time service (1,700 hours), each AmeriCorps member receives a stipend and earns an education award that may be used to pay for higher education or to help pay back existing student loans. There are also part-time members who receive pro-rated stipends and educational awards. Furthermore, there are members who receive only the educational award but no stipend.

The typical AmeriCorps*State/National program averages 20-25 members (although some have several hundred); about three-quarters of the members serve full-time. There is considerable flexibility in program structure and services provided. Approximately two-thirds of the funding goes to State Commissions, which subsequently distribute funds to local organizations throughout the states. These comprise the "State" programs. The remaining funds go to National programs that sponsor programs in multiple states. State and National programs address community needs in one of four issue areas: education, public safety, human services, and the environment, through the following types of services:

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1 15,000 of these 35,000 members are enrolled in the AmeriCorps Education Awards Only Program and receive no Corporation funded stipend. These numbers refer to the 1999-2000 program year.

2 VISTA and NCCC programs are not a focus of this study.

3 Part-time terms of service are defined as 900 hours of service during a period of not more than two years, or three years if the participant is enrolled at an institution of higher education (approximately 10-15 hours per week).

- Tutoring teens and educationally disadvantaged students;
- Organizing neighborhood crime watches;
- Converting vacant lots into neighborhood parks;
- Leading community health awareness campaigns; and
- Operating food banks.

The Corporation's Involvement with Education and Literacy

Improving the educational achievement of American children and youth has become increasingly important as we move into the 21st century because of the expanding demands of a technological society and the globalization of the economy and the workforce. To succeed in this new environment, children and adults alike must be able to read and comprehend text. Furthermore, the ability to read well, to be literate, has other important benefits, including reading books for one's own enjoyment, reading to one's children, reading to obtain knowledge and to continue one's own learning, to name just a few. Thus, to read well is a critical cornerstone for successful academic, professional and personal development.

Students' reading performance has been a major issue not only among educational practitioners and researchers, but among national, political and economic leaders as well. In fact, President Clinton's administration has devoted significant attention and resources to reading, both through the Department of Education and through other federal agencies and major initiatives. The administration's commitment to improving students' reading abilities was reflected, for example, when Secretary of Education Richard Riley recently discussed new efforts to raise students' reading achievement at a national conference of reading organizations (Riley, 1999). Secretary Riley noted that, "Even though our nation's reading scores are finally going up, we still have millions of young people who are struggling to master the basics."

The Secretary unveiled three new tools to improve student reading:

- *Start Early, Finish Strong*, a report that provides a plan of action for parents, schools and policymakers to improve student reading performance;
- *The Compact for Reading*, "a tool kit for families and schools to work together to improve student reading;" and
- *Child Care READS*, a privately-funded project, inspired by President Clinton's America Reads initiative, to introduce reading skills to child care providers of preschool children and to promote after-school and summer reading programs for school-aged children.

Clearly, the reading performance of our nation's children is a highly visible priority.

Education-related activities have consistently been at the forefront of initiatives for the Corporation since its inception in 1993. Indeed, education programs comprise the largest single area of service (of the four critical areas of need) and represent a significant portion of the programs funded by the Corporation. Most recently, the Corporation has directed substantial resources toward the national issue of children's reading performance. This focus targets an important national mandate, as articulated in the America Reads initiative: *to help ensure that every child can read well and independently by the end of the third grade*. Toward this end, the Corporation has encouraged its programs to conduct educational and instructional activities aimed at meeting this challenge through the provision of literacy services to young readers.

Across all program streams (AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve, Senior Corps), literacy services are provided to school-aged children and young people, to parents, and to other adults who need help in improving their reading proficiencies. These services occur through a variety of strategies, including tutoring, mentoring, volunteering as classroom assistants, and other literacy-related activities (e.g., conducting trips to the library, organizing book distributions). Such literacy activities represent a major investment of Corporation resources.

The Descriptive Study of AmeriCorps*State/National Literacy Programs

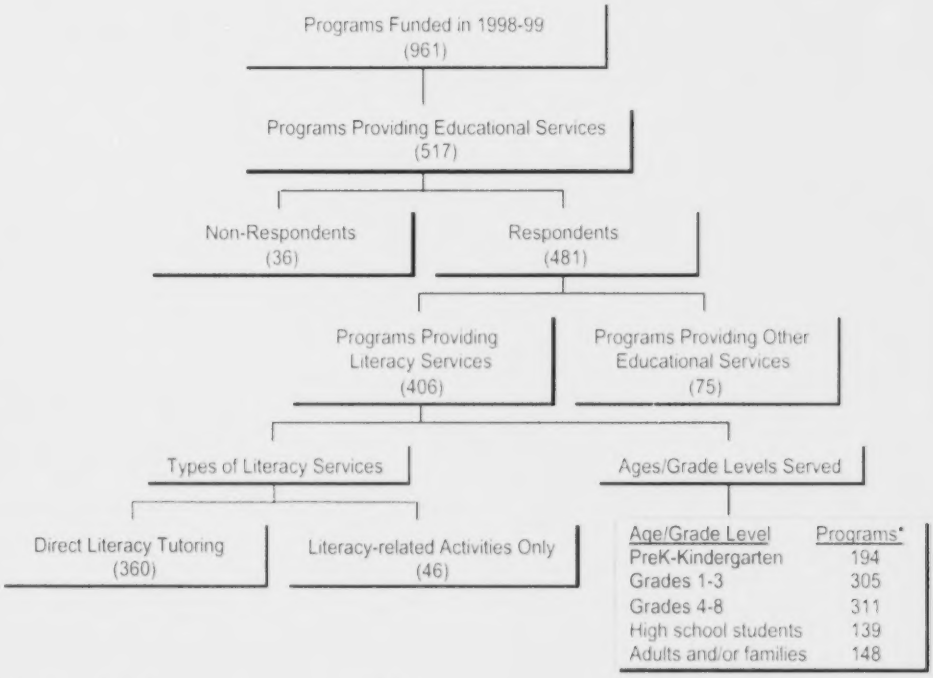
To learn more about the range of literacy activities it supports, the Corporation contracted with Abt Associates to conduct an independent *Descriptive Study of AmeriCorps Literacy Programs: State and National* to inform staff, programs, Congress and other stakeholders about the literacy activities AmeriCorps*State/National programs provide to communities. The objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Describe programs that conduct educational activities in terms of their programmatic structures and the literacy and tutoring activities they have implemented;
- Identify programs using effective reading literacy instructional models likely to improve children's reading abilities;
- Describe the target population receiving services; and
- Furnish the descriptive and demographic information required in order to design a future study of the impact of literacy activities on children's reading skills. These programs would then be included in the second component of the Evaluation, the *Outcome Evaluation of Literacy and Tutoring Programs*.

The Respondent Sample

The primary source of data used to address these objectives is a *Descriptive Survey* designed and administered by Abt Associates to directors of those AmeriCorps*State/National programs that provide educational and literacy services. (Appendix A provides more detailed information about the design and administration of the *Descriptive Survey*. A copy of the survey instrument is presented in Appendix B). Exhibit 1.1 illustrates several key features of the respondent sample.[4]

Exhibit 1.1 The Respondent Sample of AmeriCorps*State/National Programs (Number)



*The total number of programs can exceed 406 because programs can serve more than one age/grade level.

According to information provided by the Corporation in the fall of 1998, 961 AmeriCorps*State/National programs were funded in the 1998-99 year to provide community service. Of this number, 517 indicated that they provide some type of *educational service* to their communities. Surveys were sent to these programs in spring of

[4] The number of programs is based on information from the Corporation's 1998-99 database.

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P1999 and 481 project directors responded. Literacy activities are conducted by 406 of these programs. Moreover, 360 programs provide direct instruction to students in the form of tutoring in reading. Tutoring programs are of particular interest to the Corporation since this type of intervention is aimed directly at improving children's reading skills.

- Slightly more than half of all AmeriCorps*State/National programs (54 percent) are involved in education.
- Forty-two percent of all programs provide literacy services (n=406).
- Thirty-seven percent of all programs provide direct tutoring in reading (n=360).
- Five percent of all programs provide literacy-related activities such as reading aloud to children or organizing trips to the library (N=46).
- Most AmeriCorps *educational programs* provide literacy services (84 percent).

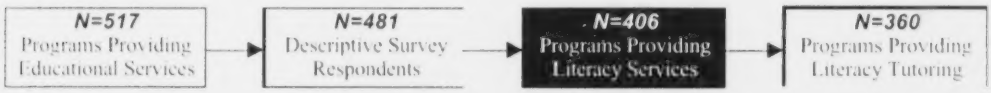
Defining Literacy

It is important to specify what is meant by "literacy," the central theme of this report, because its definition varies. In educational practice and research, the concept of "literacy" has been used to refer to a broad range of academic skills (e.g., math literacy, science literacy, writing, etc.). *However, for the purposes of this study, literacy activities are defined as activities intended to foster the development of reading ability in children or adults.* This may occur either directly (e.g., direct instruction via tutoring, classroom instruction, academic mentoring or reading aloud to children) or indirectly (e.g., organizing trips to the library or supporting family literacy activities). Under this definition "literacy services" refers to a wide range of specific, reading-focused instructional and motivational activities, including teaching students the building blocks of successful reading -- what some educators and researchers call reading subskills -- as well as instilling motivation and enjoyment in students. This definition is consistent with both the thrust of recent initiatives and with the concerns of the Corporation.

The Organization of the Report

Chapter Two describes the organizational structure (e.g., types of sponsoring agencies, funding sources, scope of literacy activities) and program operations (e.g., prior experience in offering educational services) of AmeriCorps*State/National literacy programs. Chapter Three discusses the *structural elements* of these literacy programs (e.g., settings, providers, recipients, training, supervision, range of literacy services, and evaluation). Chapter Four begins with a discussion of the current research about *effective tutoring practices*, followed by a discussion of the programs' literacy characteristics; it concludes with an analysis of the extent to which the structure of the tutoring programs aligns with effective tutoring practices.

Chapter Two
Description of the AmeriCorps*State/National Literacy Programs



All of the programs that completed the survey (n=481) reported involvement in general educational services.[1] This report concentrates on those AmeriCorps programs that provide literacy services, 406 or 84 percent of the responding programs *representing 42 percent of all AmeriCorps*State/National programs.* The discussion throughout Chapter Two focuses upon these programs.[2]

This chapter begins with a description of the organizational structures of the literacy programs, including their sponsoring agencies, funding sources, and the scope of their literacy efforts. Next, the discussion turns to program operations, including the extent of previous experience in offering any educational services, especially to children, and the operational characteristics of those AmeriCorps programs offering literacy services.

Organizational Structure

The Sponsoring Agencies of Literacy Programs

*Most AmeriCorps*State/National literacy programs are sponsored by community-based organizations (61 percent) or, secondarily, educational institutions (29 percent).*

AmeriCorps*State/National programs providing literacy services are generally administered by sponsoring or host agencies which are at least partially responsible for the implementation of the planned activities that members will conduct. They also may be involved in the training and supervision of members. As shown in Exhibit 2.1, there is considerable variation in the types of agencies operating AmeriCorps educational programs, ranging from state agencies and statewide initiatives to religious organizations and local community-based organizations. More than half (61 percent) are sponsored by community-based or non-profit organizations (e.g., community action programs or community development agencies). More than one quarter (29 percent) are sponsored

[1] Data on selected survey items are presented for the full respondent sample in Appendix C.

[2] The figures presented are percentages of these 406 AmeriCorps programs providing educational and literacy services. However, not all 406 programs answered every question accurately. The non-response rate typically ranged from 3 to 5 percent, and does not affect the findings or conclusions. Items with a greater non-response rate have been footnoted.

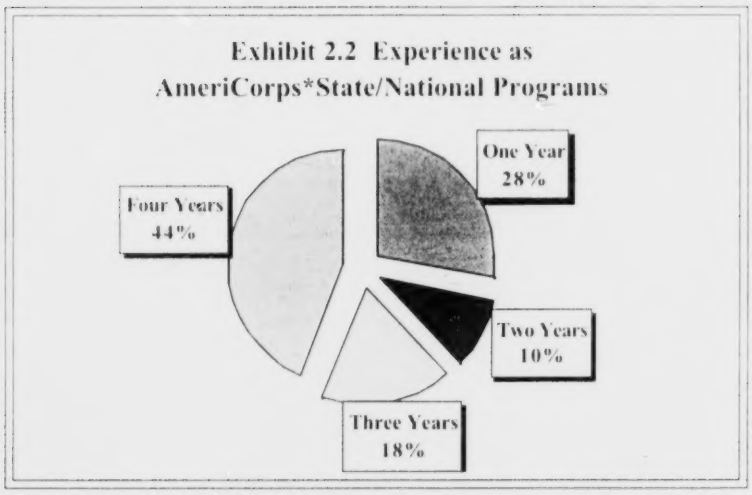
by educational institutions, including four-year postsecondary institutions (13 percent), local school districts (11 percent), and community colleges (5 percent).

Exhibit 2.1 Types of Agencies Sponsoring AmeriCorps*State/National Programs Providing Literacy Services

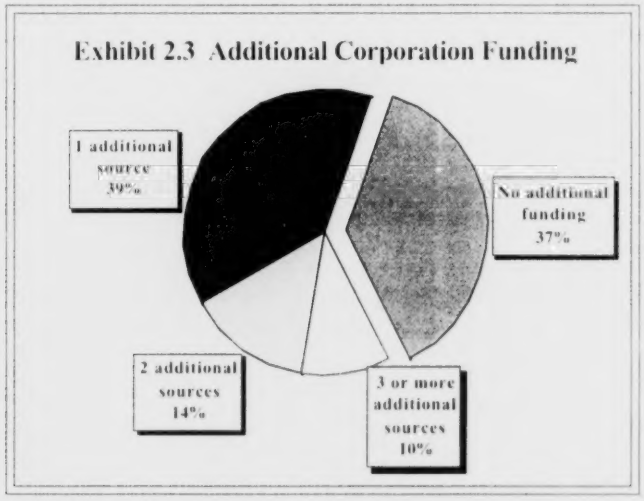
Funding Sources of Literacy Programs

*Almost three-quarters of AmeriCorps*State/National literacy programs have been operating for two or more years. Almost half have received State/National grants since AmeriCorps' first year of implementation, 1994-95. Almost one-fifth of the programs (17 percent) use members or volunteers who are supported by Federal Work Study funds.*

As shown in Exhibit 2.2, most programs currently providing literacy services have several years experience operating as AmeriCorps*State/National programs. Almost three quarters of the programs (72 percent) have received two or more AmeriCorps*State/National grants in the last four years. Further, almost half (44 percent) had been receiving these grants since 1994 when the program began.



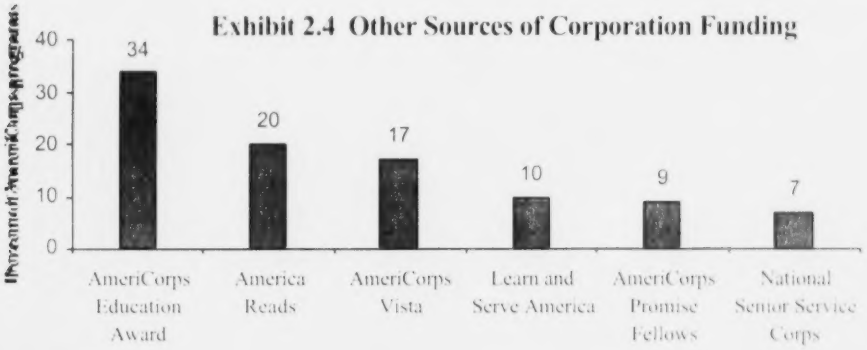
Almost two-thirds of AmeriCorps*State/National literacy programs leverage funding for their literacy activities by receiving grants through other Corporation programs (Exhibit 2.3).



A related funding stream, targeted specifically to literacy, is America Reads, the national initiative to promote literacy and improve reading. About one-fifth of the programs providing literacy services supplement their program with funds from America Reads, distributed either

by the Corporation or the U.S. Department of Education (Exhibit 2.4).[3] Other Corporation funding streams supporting these AmeriCorps programs include Learn and Serve America and the National Senior Service Corps.

Exhibit 2.4 Other Sources of Corporation Funding



The Federal Work-Study Program (FWS) provides undergraduate and graduate students with part-time employment to help them meet their financial needs and give them work experience, while helping the campus or surrounding community. Historically, the FWS Program has paid up to 75 percent of students' wages, but since 1997, FWS has paid 100 percent of the wages of work-study students who serve as reading mentors, tutors to preschool and elementary school children, or who tutor in family literacy programs.[4] The FWS Program has been a valuable resource for many AmeriCorps*State/National literacy programs. Almost one-fifth of the programs (17 percent) use members who are FWS-supported.

Scope of AmeriCorps' Literacy Efforts

*In 1998-99, AmeriCorps*State/National programs used more than 10,000 members and 40,000 volunteers to provide literacy services to over 260,000 individuals, 90 percent of whom are children.*

Members

One way to gauge a program's commitment to literacy is to calculate the proportion of its members engaged in literacy activities. *For programs reporting involvement in literacy services, the vast majority of members (93 percent) provide literacy services.* For the year 1998-99, AmeriCorps*State/National literacy programs used more than 10,000 members (both full-time and

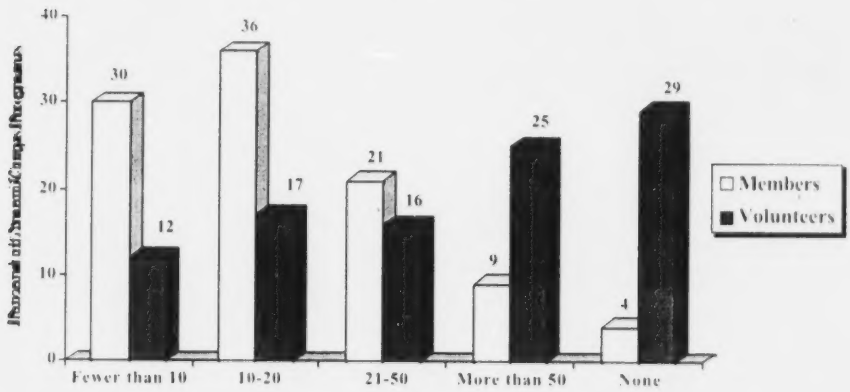
[3] The 20 percent that receive America Reads funds consists of 11 percent that receive funds from the Corporation, 6 percent that receive funds from the U.S. Department of Education, and 3 percent that receive America Reads funds but could not identify the specific source.

[4] U.S. Department of Education website: http://www.ed.gov/inits/americareads/overfws.html (11/3/1999)

part-time)[5] and more than 40,000 volunteers to deliver literacy services to more than 260,000 individuals, 90 percent of whom are children.

Even though the total national literacy effort is substantial, most programs engaged in literacy activities tend to be small to medium-sized, using fewer than 20 members to deliver literacy services (Exhibit 2.5). While the number of members engaged in literacy activities ranges from none to 1,265, the median number is 14.[6] About one-third of the programs have fewer than 10 members involved in literacy, while a similar proportion have between ten and 20 members.

Exhibit 2.5 Number of Individuals Providing Literacy Services



Volunteers

The magnitude of a program's literacy efforts also depends on the extent to which programs use volunteers (generally recruited by members) to deliver literacy services. Almost three-quarters of the programs (70 percent) used volunteers to deliver literacy services, and, as presented in Exhibit 2.5, one-quarter of the programs reported using 50 or more volunteers. Across all programs, the

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[5] Since we do not have information on the number of part-time members who complete their terms in one, two, or three years, part-time members were counted as one-half of a full-time member for these calculations. As a result, these calculations may slightly overestimate the average size of the programs.

[6] The median, rather than the mean, is presented because there is severe overrepresentation of high or low values in the distribution. When distributions have this characteristic, the mean or average is not a good measure of central tendency. Instead, the median, the middle value in the distribution (half the values are smaller and half are larger), is the preferred measure of central tendency.

In addition, thirteen programs report that no members conduct literacy activities; ten of these programs rely solely on volunteers to conduct literacy activities, while three programs report delivering literacy services but do not provide numbers of staff.

number of volunteers engaged in literacy activities varied greatly, ranging from programs with none to one program with 9,000; the median number of volunteers used was 15.

Students Served

*Most AmeriCorps*State/National literacy programs (76 percent) serve over 100 students.*

Many State/National literacy programs reported that they conduct activities with a large number of students. More than three programs in four serve more than 100 students, and more than half serve more than 250 students (Exhibit 2.6). Only eleven percent of the programs serve 50 or fewer students.

Exhibit 2.6
Average Number of Students Served per Program

Number of Students:	Percent of Programs
More than 500 students	32
251 – 500 students	20
101 – 250 students	24
76 – 100 students	8
51 – 75 students	5
25 – 50 students	8
Fewer than 25 students	3

Total numbers of staff members and students served provide one estimate of the size and scope of AmeriCorps' literacy efforts; another approach is to consider these counts in combination by comparing the number of full-time staff delivering literacy services to the number of students reportedly served. The typical (median) program has approximately a 1-20 staff-to-student ratio. To be sure, this ratio of staff to students is not a measure of class size, but rather an estimate of the intensity or concentration of staff providing literacy services. Since we have no reliable method of calculating the efforts of volunteers, these numbers of staff only include members and thus underestimate the amount of staff resources devoted to students receiving literacy services. More than half of the programs (54 percent) reported providing English-as-Second-Language (ESL) services to students. Nationwide, across all literacy programs in the sample, approximately 31,765

The median, rather than the mean, is presented because there is severe overrepresentation of high or low values in the distribution. When distributions have this characteristic, the mean or average is not a good measure of central tendency. Instead, the median, the middle value in the distribution (half the values are smaller and half are larger), is the preferred measure of central tendency.

students received ESL services in the 1998-99 program year.[8] On average, the number of ESL students served per program is relatively small; sixty percent of programs serve 20 or fewer students and only 13 percent serve more than 50 students.

Program Operations

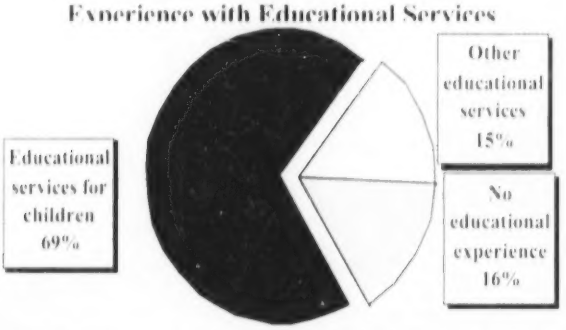
This section describes the sponsoring agencies' experiences in providing educational services to communities. In addition, the operational characteristics of the AmeriCorps programs are described in terms of educational activities and staffing.

Sponsoring Agencies' Delivery of Educational Services

*Most sponsoring agencies supporting AmeriCorps*State/National literacy programs are experienced providers of educational services, specifically to children.*

Most of the sponsoring agencies supporting AmeriCorps literacy programs are experienced providers of educational services, particularly of literacy services. The vast majority of the agencies (82 percent) have been operating for *five years or more*, and most (84 percent) had provided educational services (either to adults or children) before receiving a Corporation grant (Exhibit 2.7).[9]

Exhibit 2.7 Sponsoring Agencies' Experience with Educational Services



As shown in Exhibit 2.8, prior to receipt of AmeriCorps*State/National funds, many sponsoring agencies have had experience in one or more of three broad educational areas: 1) direct academic instruction (e.g., tutoring, GED instruction, special education); 2) general educational support (e.g.,

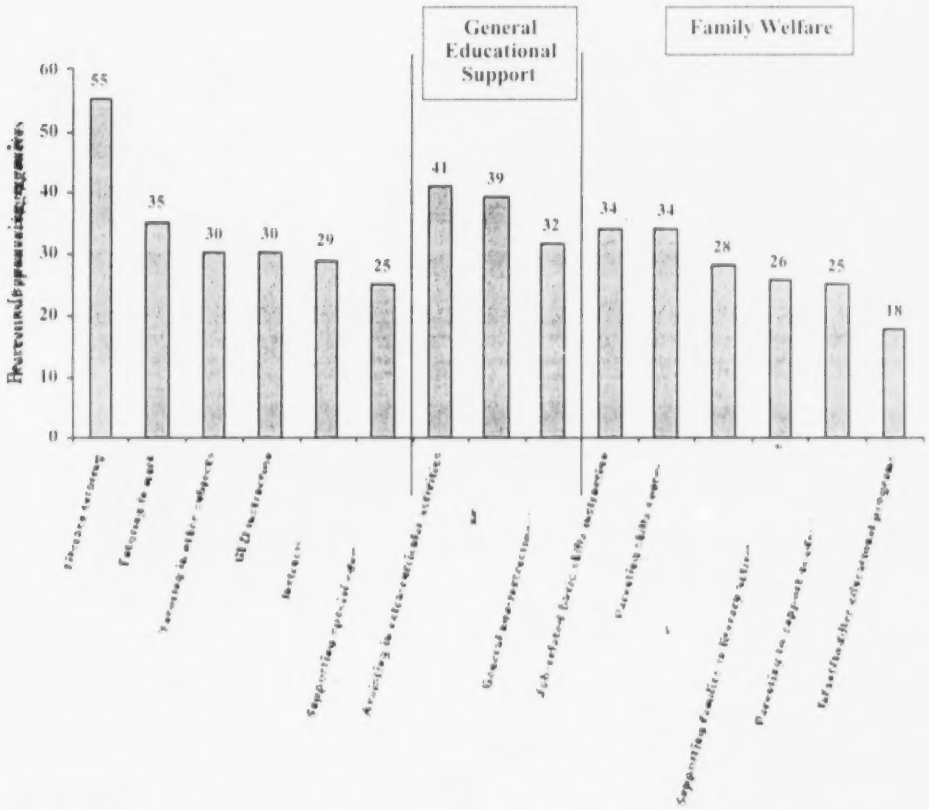
[8] Total number of ESL students was calculated using data from 193 of 221 programs providing ESL services. Thirteen percent of the programs providing ESL services were unable to estimate the percentage of their student population that received ESL services.

[9] Programs may have received funding prior to 1993 under grants from the Corporation's predecessor organization, the Cor[illegible]nity Service.

Direct Academic Instruction

mentoring, extra-curricular activities); and 3) family welfare (e.g., job-related basic skills, parenting skills, family/school involvement).

Exhibit 2.8 Sponsoring Agencies' Experience by Content Area



Over half of the agencies (55 percent) had prior experience delivering literacy-related services (e.g., tutoring in reading, reading aloud to children, listening to children read, ESL instruction). Between 30 and 40 percent of the agencies had experience providing tutoring assistance in mathematics (35 percent) and other subjects (30 percent), general instructional support (29 percent), and mentoring students (39 percent).

Sponsoring agencies have experience working with learners of various ages, from elementary to high school students, as well as adults. Most agencies have experience marshalling the efforts of volunteers (85 percent).

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About half of all agencies had experience serving high school students (47 percent), other adults in the community (47 percent) or elementary school students (45 percent). It is also noteworthy that even among sponsoring agencies not part of school districts, over half (54 percent) have had prior experience with literacy service delivery. It is abundantly clear, then, that sponsoring agencies are organizing themselves to provide services for which they have had significant and appropriate experience.

Not only are most sponsoring agencies experienced providers of education, but most have a prior history of recruiting volunteers: about 85 percent of the agencies had used volunteers before receiving the most recent (1998-99) AmeriCorps*State/National grant. However, only 29 percent had used volunteers to deliver educational services, and only 5 percent had used volunteers to deliver literacy services.

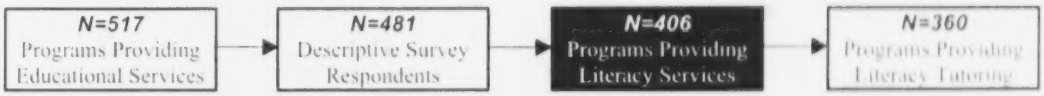
AmeriCorps*State/National Commitment to Literacy

*Most AmeriCorps*State/National educational programs provide literacy services (84 percent); a large proportion of members in each program are involved in literacy services (75 percent).*

AmeriCorps*State/National programs allocate substantial resources for literacy services designed to improve the reading of our nation's children. In fact, the 406 programs providing *literacy* services represent 84 percent of the 481 programs providing *educational* services in general. Further, programs allocate significant resources to their literacy-related efforts.

- In about two-thirds of the programs, the majority of members (75 percent) are involved in conducting literacy activities.
- In almost half of the programs (46 percent), *all* of the members are involved with literacy.
- About half of the programs reported that members who deliver literacy services are devoted *exclusively* to educational and/or literacy services.

Chapter Three
Structure of Literacy Programs



This chapter describes the structural characteristics of literacy services provided to students participating in AmeriCorps*State/National programs. As in Chapter Two, the information presented here is also based on responses from the 406 programs that conducted literacy services in the 1998-99 school year. The discussion below includes information about the:

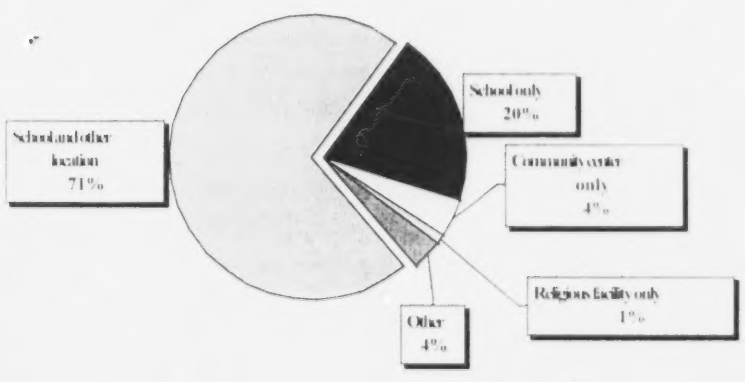
- settings for literacy activities;
- providers of services, members and volunteers;
- recipients of services; and
- literacy program structure.

Settings for Literacy Activities

*Virtually all AmeriCorps*State/National literacy programs deliver services in schools. A majority of these programs deliver services in a variety of settings and at multiple sites within each type of setting.*

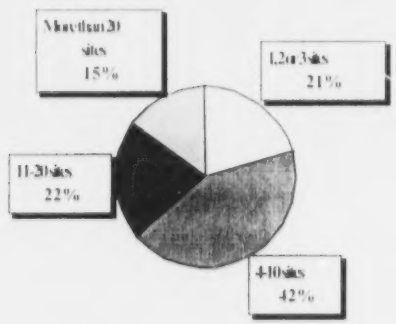
AmeriCorps*State/National programs typically provide literacy services in three settings: schools, community centers, and libraries. As shown in Exhibit 3.1, virtually all (91 percent) programs deliver services at schools. Many programs deliver services in schools as well as in other locations, often community-based facilities such as community centers or libraries.

Exhibit 3.1 Settings for Literacy Activities



In addition to providing services in different settings, programs typically deliver services in multiple sites within a particular setting type; that is, they offer services in several different schools or community facilities. Most programs operate in a small number of sites; almost two-thirds of programs (63 percent) provide services in 10 or fewer sites (Exhibit 3.2).

Exhibit 3.2 Number of Sites



As shown in Exhibit 3.3, literacy services are typically offered at varied times during the day, week, and school year, allowing increased scheduling flexibility for students and school staff.

- Most programs offer services during the school day as well as before and after school and/or during the summer.
- Many programs conduct literacy services during the summer (77 percent) and on weekends (40 percent).

Exhibit 3.3

When are Literacy Services Offered

Times:	Percent of Programs*
Before or after school	89
In school, during the school day	84
During the summer	77
On weekends	40
Services offered at all four times	27

*Total can exceed 100 percent because programs can offer services at more than one time.

Providers of Literacy Services

Virtually all programs use Corporation members to deliver literacy services; almost three-quarters use volunteers recruited by members.

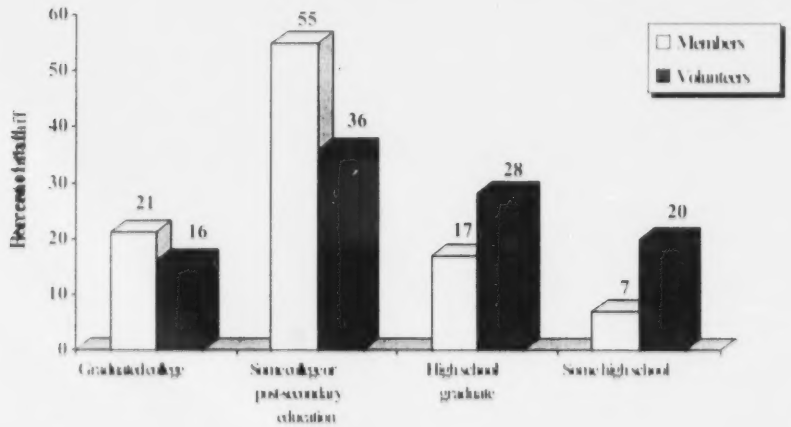
Nearly all programs use Corporation members to deliver their services. Volunteers recruited by Corporation members also play a significant role in providing services, since they are used by almost three-quarters of the AmeriCorps literacy programs (70 percent). Only a few programs rely solely on volunteers to provide literacy services (two percent).

Educational Attainment

*The majority of AmeriCorps*State/National members (76 percent) have completed some college education.*

Members are required to have a high school diploma or its equivalent, and if not, they must commit to obtaining one.[1] Exhibit 3.4 shows that the majority of Corporation members delivering literacy services have either graduated from college (21 percent) or completed some postsecondary education (55 percent).[2] The volunteers recruited by members are not subject to the same educational criteria as Corporation members and have not obtained the same level of education, on average. Nevertheless, the volunteers recruited in programs

Exhibit 3.4 Education Levels Attained by Literacy Staff



[1] Federal Register, Vol. 59, No. 56, March 23, 1994, p. 13779.

[2] Of the 393 programs that use members, 369 (or 93 percent) reported valid educational background data for their members.

conducting literacy services are reasonably well-educated. Over 80 percent have graduated high school, and more than half have some college education.[1]

Recipients of Literacy Services

Programs report using several sources of information to select the students who are to receive literacy services:

- recommendations from teachers (81 percent);
- test scores (65 percent);
- student grades (62 percent);
- recommendations by other school personnel (60 percent); and
- requests from parents of students or from the students themselves (21 percent).

Most literacy programs (83 percent) rely on more than one source of information to determine which students should receive services. In particular, more than half of the programs use, at a minimum, a combination of test scores, student grades and teacher recommendations.

Ages/Grades Served

Programs conduct literacy services across a wide age range: from infants and toddlers to adults (Exhibit 3.5). Three out of four programs conduct literacy activities with students in

Exhibit 3.5 Age Range/Grade Levels Served by Literacy Programs

Age Range/Grade Level	Percent of Programs*	Percent of Students Served, Nationwide
Infants and toddlers	18	2
Preschool/Kindergarten	50	13
Grades 1-3	79	30
Grades 4-6	76	22
Grades 7-8	52	12
High School Students	36	10
Family Members	28	5
Other Adults	25	6

*Total percentage of programs can add to over 100 percent because programs can serve more than one age group

[1] Of the 260 programs that reported using volunteers to delivery literacy services, 193 (or 72 percent) reported valid educational background data for their volunteers.

one or more of the elementary grades (1 through 6); about one-third of the programs work with high school students, and about one-quarter work with family members and adults. Furthermore, almost all programs provide literacy services at several grade/age ranges. For example, 44 percent of the programs serve some combination of students *in each of these grade ranges*: 1-3, 4-6, and 7-8. Only a few programs limit the provision of service to one age grade category; for instance, *only one percent of the programs serve only high school students*.

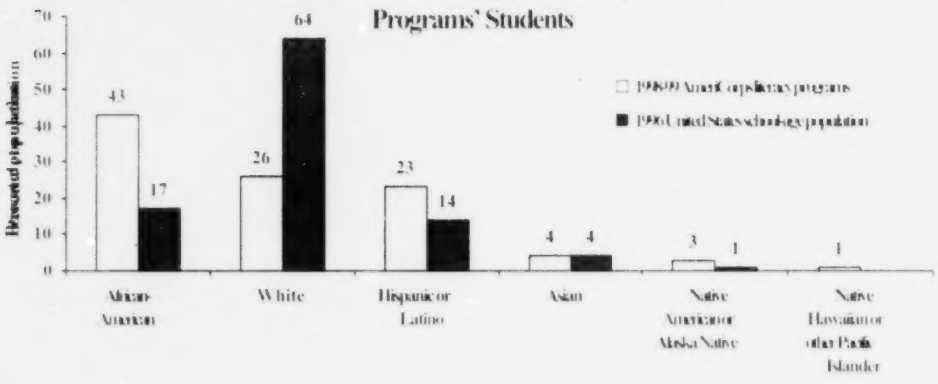
Another way to characterize the population of students receiving literacy services is to aggregate the numbers of students across all programs, nationwide. This distribution is also shown in Exhibit 3.5. In absolute numbers, students receiving literacy services are concentrated in grades 1 through 8. Almost one-third of the population (30 percent) served by AmeriCorps literacy programs is in grades 1 through 3, and almost one-quarter (22 percent) is in grades 4 through 6.

Racial and Ethnic Characteristics

*The majority of the students served by AmeriCorps*State/National literacy programs are African-American or Hispanic.*

In terms of ethnicity, the largest proportion of students being served by literacy programs is African-American (43 percent), followed by Hispanic (23 percent); however, this is not representative of the United States' school-age population (Exhibit 3.6).[3] While

Exhibit 3.6 Racial/Ethnic Characteristics of AmeriCorps Literacy Programs' Students



[3] U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics, 1998*. NCES 1999-036, by Thomas D. Snyder. Washington, DC: 1999, p. 60. Based on fall 1996 public school enrollment data.

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nationally, racial/ethnic minorities comprise approximately 37 percent of the school-age population, they comprise twice that proportion (74 percent) in the student population receiving literacy services. These findings are not surprising. Since literacy programs target those children in need of additional literacy services, the population of students served should mirror that of academically disadvantaged students nationwide, and minority students are overrepresented among the academically disadvantaged student population.[5]

The Literacy Program Structure

Collaborative Planning

The implementation of AmeriCorps*State/National literacy programs typically requires cooperation and coordination among multiple agencies and organizations, including schools, community centers, day care centers, and libraries. This interdependence is reflected in the planning and implementation of literacy activities, which often incorporate input from multiple stakeholders.

- Two-thirds of the literacy programs (66 percent) reported that in general, their literacy activities reflected another agency's needs assessment.[6]

- In many programs, classroom teachers (85 percent) and reading specialists (66 percent) are involved in the planning of literacy activities.

Goals

Survey respondents were asked to identify the goals of the programs' literacy activities. Most programs strive to improve overall academic achievement (89 percent) and reading comprehension (89 percent) as well as increase students' motivation for reading (85 percent). Over half of the programs (56 percent) want to increase parents' involvement in their children's reading. It is noteworthy that programs recognize that in order to effect change in students' literacy skills, student motivation and parental involvement are important components.

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[5] Puma, M. J., Karweit, N., Price, C., Ricciuti, A, Thompson, W., and Vaden-Kiernan, M. (1997). *Prospects: Final Report on Student Outcomes*. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Education.

[6] In this section, respondents' answers were in the form of "not at all," "very little," "somewhat," and "a great deal." The percentages presented here reflect the proportion of respondents who answered "somewhat" or "a great deal."

Training and Supervision

Nearly all literacy programs (93 percent) provide literacy training for members and volunteers who deliver literacy services.

The provision of intensive and ongoing training is perceived by researchers as an important element in an effective literacy program. Training may be provided by a variety of sources, as shown in Exhibit 3.7.

Exhibit 3.7

Providers of Training

Providers:	Percent of Programs*
Sponsoring agency	58
AmeriCorps program staff	57
Local school district	55
Outside experts	52
College or university	37
State Commission	13

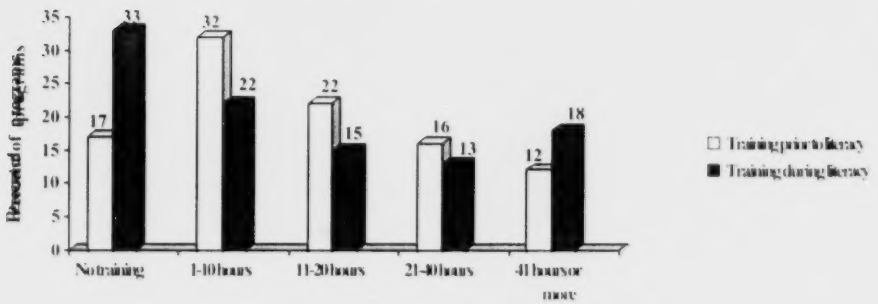
*Total can exceed 100 percent because programs can utilize more than one provider.

Intensity of Training

Nearly all literacy programs (93 percent) devote considerable time and resources to training members and/or volunteers in the conduct of literacy activities either before or during service delivery. Over four-fifths of literacy programs (83 percent) provide training sessions for members prior to their literacy work with students. Among programs providing pre-service training, the hours of training range from 1 to 300 hours, with a median of 16 hours.[1] As shown in Exhibit 3.8, one-third of all literacy programs provide between 1 and 10 hours of pre-service training, and more than a quarter (28 percent) provide 21 or more hours of training prior to service provision.

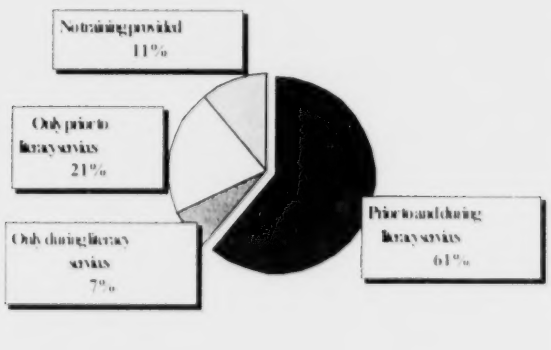
[1] The median, rather than the mean, is presented because there is severe overrepresentation of high or low values in the distribution. When distributions have this characteristic, the mean or average is not a good measure of central tendency. Instead, the median, the middle value in the distribution (half the values are smaller and half are larger), is the preferred measure of central tendency.

Exhibit 3.8 Hours of Training in Literacy Instruction



Two-thirds of literacy programs (68 percent) provide training concurrently with the provision of literacy activities. Among these programs, the hours of training sessions provided during the period of service provision ranges from 1 to 920, with a median of 20 hours. Approximately one-third (32 percent) provide 21 or more hours of such training, while about one in every five literacy programs provides between 1 and 10 hours of in-service training. Additionally, the majority of programs provide training prior to and during the delivery of services (Exhibit 3.9).

Exhibit 3.9 Training in Literacy Instruction



Training Topics and Materials

Effective volunteer literacy efforts depend upon targeted training and exposure to relevant materials. As shown in Exhibit 3.10, most literacy programs provide training and materials on various aspects of reading, as well as in learning how to motivate and work with children. Most of the training offered in reading is generic (i.e. skills to teach children or adults, reading in general); only 29 percent of programs offer training or materials linked to a

particular instructional model. At the same time, programs also recognize the importance of understanding child development and how to work with children in order to be an effective volunteer; almost 80 percent of programs provide training in how to work with young children.

Exhibit 3.10

Training Topics and Materials Provided to Members and Volunteers

General Subject Area:	Percent of Programs*	
	Training	Materials
Reading Instruction		
Teaching reading skills to children	74	70
Learning about reading in general	61	56
Specific, "brand name" instructional models	29	33
Teaching reading skills to adults	22	21
Child Development		
Learning to work with young children	79	64
Techniques to keep children motivated	74	59
Children's social and emotional development	66	48
Children's cognitive development	55	44
Working with children who have special needs	45	30
Other		
Multicultural awareness	69	50
Fostering family literacy	30	30
ESL	28	23

*Total can exceed 100 percent because programs can provide training or materials on multiple topics.

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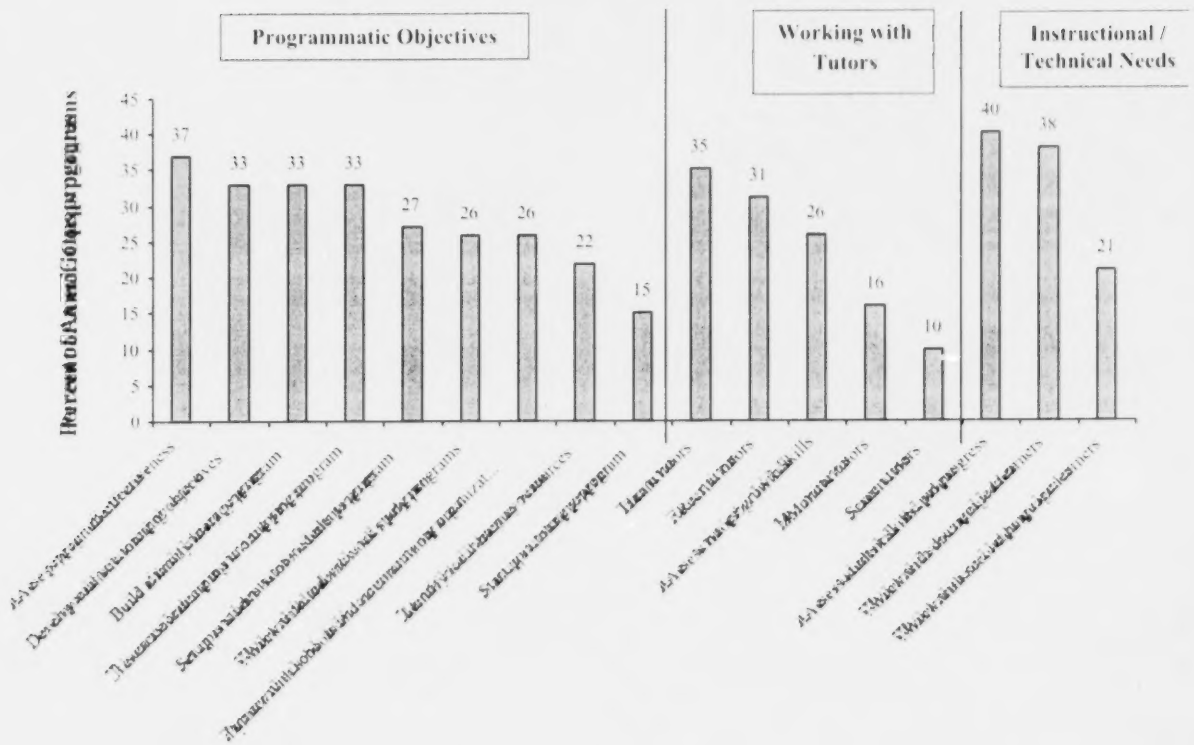
Exhibit 3.11 Training and Technical Assistance Needs



Training and technical assistance are important elements in the implementation of effective literacy programs. Survey respondents reported the need for training and assistance in three broad areas: 1) programmatic elements; 2) working with tutors; and 3) instructional/technical needs (Exhibit 3.11). No one particular training area was reported as a 'need' by more than 40 percent of programs, suggesting that programs differ in terms of their training needs.

Supervision/monitoring

Members and volunteers providing literacy services must also be monitored to ensure that the skills have been learned and are being applied properly in their work with students. As shown in Exhibit 3.12, nearly all programs (96 percent) reported that their staff monitors service provision by members through:

- regular meetings with site coordinators to discuss literacy services (79 percent);
- observation of members while they provide services (71 percent); and
- written reports from members (69 percent).

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Exhibit 3.12

Methods of Monitoring Members' Service Provision

Monitoring Methods:	Percent of Programs*
Members meet with site coordinator regularly	79
Members are observed while providing literacy services	71
Members file a report	69
Staff from sponsoring agency provide reports	50
Members meet with site coordinator as needed	41
Feedback from school or teacher	3

*Total can exceed 100 percent because programs can use multiple monitoring methods.

As reported earlier, many programs use volunteers to provide literacy services. Their activities with students also must be monitored to ensure the implementation of effective practices. In about half of the programs, volunteers are monitored by AmeriCorps members. Others who may oversee volunteers include teachers (16 percent), AmeriCorps or agency staff (14 percent), and reading specialists (9 percent).

The Range of Literacy Services Offered

Literacy programs offer a wide range of instructional and support services, and most provide tutoring in reading (87 percent).

This section briefly highlights the broad range of literacy services provided by AmeriCorps*State/National literacy programs.[5] Programs offer a wide range of literacy services in two broad areas: direct instructional services (e.g., tutoring, homework or classroom assistance) and indirect support services that support a variety of instructional activities (e.g., recruiting and supervising volunteers). Most literacy programs provide direct instructional services, including reading tutoring to children (87 percent), homework assistance (79 percent), and reading to children (75 percent) (Exhibit 3.13). Program members also provide indirect services, including developing and preparing instructional materials (65 percent), and organizing activities designed to increase children's motivation to read (62 percent).

[5] Individual frequencies describing the literacy and educational services provided by the complete respondent sample of those programs that provide educational services (n= 481) are included in Appendix C.

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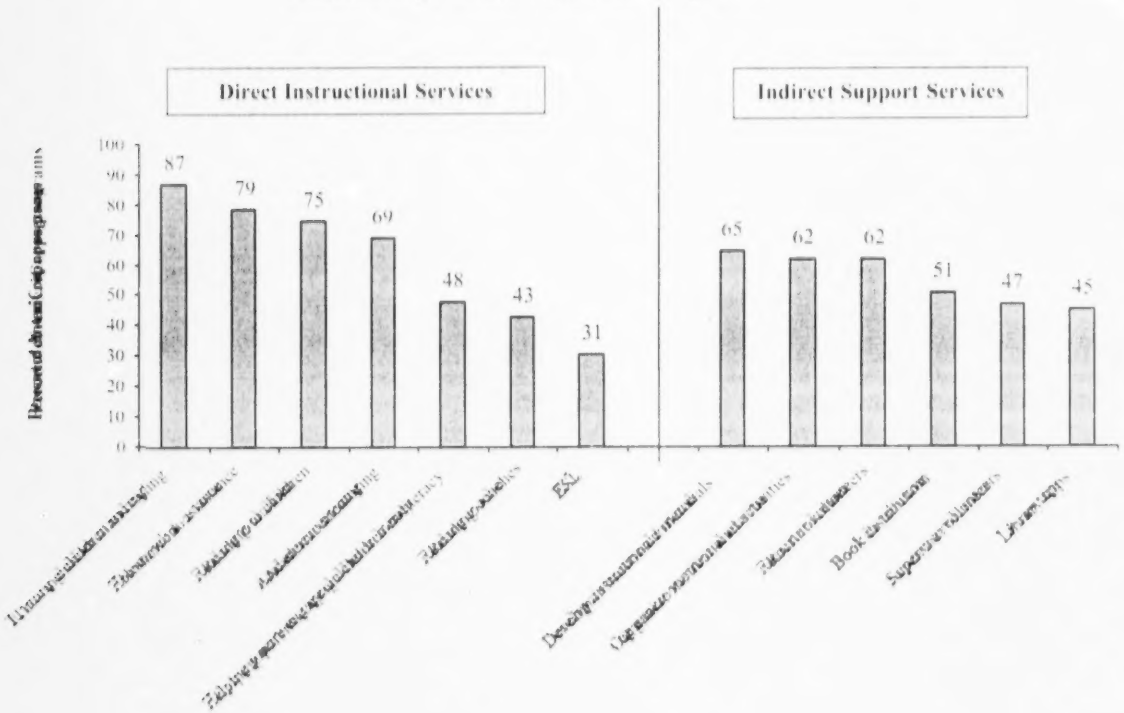
Exhibit 3.13 The Range of Literacy Activities Provided by AmeriCorps*State/National Programs



Not only do programs offer a wide range of literacy services; nearly all programs provide more than one type of literacy service. On average, programs provide between six and seven *direct literacy services*; more than one-third provide eight or more direct literacy services.[9] Almost 40 percent of the programs provide six or more *indirect services*, with an average of about four indirect services.

Evaluation

The majority of literacy programs (75 percent) conduct formal evaluations to assess the effectiveness of their literacy services.

Evaluation can provide valuable information to program directors about implementation,

[9] The Descriptive Survey asks about nine direct literacy services to children provided. Exhibit 3.13 presents the seven services obtaining the largest proportions, greater than 30 percent. The remaining two literacy services are: 1) serving as an interpreter for children not fluent in English (25 percent); and 2) helping children reading to adults (28 percent).

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operations, and the impact of activities on those receiving services. In fact, the majority of programs with a literacy component conduct formal evaluations to assess the effectiveness of literacy activities (75 percent). A number of programs collect information *expressly to learn about their literacy efforts*. The most frequently cited data sources collected specifically for evaluation purposes are:

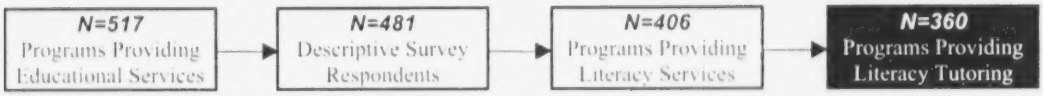
- students' progress as reported by teachers, principals or parents (58 percent);
- observations of students in tutoring sessions or the classroom (52 percent);
- tutors' assessments/ratings of reading achievement (50 percent); and
- direct assessments of students' skills designed specifically for the literacy effort (46 percent).

Programs may also *use existing data sources* in their evaluations—information collected for other purposes, including:

- teacher assessments/ratings (58 percent);
- students' grades (50 percent);
- standardized test scores (45 percent); and
- assessment results that are part of a specific instructional reading program (40 percent).

There is some variation in the conduct of evaluations by program type. Programs conducting literacy tutoring are more likely to conduct formal evaluations than are programs with no literacy tutoring (78 vs. 50 percent, respectively). Further, programs receiving America Reads funds are somewhat more likely to conduct evaluations than those that do not (86 percent vs. 72 percent).

Chapter Four
Tutoring Activities and Effective Practices



Given its commitment to improving the educational outcomes of our nation's students, the Corporation is keenly interested in learning about the literacy activities and strategies used by its members in their work with students. As noted earlier, the magnitude of the AmeriCorps investment in literacy efforts is substantial. How effective are these strategies? What are the best ways to use volunteers to help children improve their reading abilities? The current study was not designed to answer these questions directly – they will be addressed in the *Outcome Evaluation of Literacy and Tutoring Programs* which will estimate the impacts of participation in AmeriCorps tutoring programs on children's reading skills. However, information from the *Descriptive Survey* can offer some preliminary evidence about possible program effects, since it provides specific information about the 'intended' design characteristics and structures of tutoring activities. By comparing programs' characteristics *to an ideal, as suggested by current research on effective practices*, we can describe the extent to which AmeriCorps programs report that they use instructional and structural approaches identified by research as those most likely to improve children's reading abilities.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the research on effective tutoring practices. The next section describes the structural characteristics of the 360 AmeriCorps programs (88 percent of the literacy programs) providing reading tutoring to students, including program intensity (e.g., duration and frequency of sessions), instructional activities and materials, groupings of students, and so on. These tutoring programs represent 37 percent of all 961 AmeriCorps*State/National programs. The last section describes the extent to which programs reportedly use effective techniques in their tutoring programs.

It is important to note that the data presented here are based on the perceptions of program directors; that is, they are not based on direct observation of tutoring activities. Thus, the results may not represent completely accurate measures of whether effective practices are being followed by AmeriCorps tutoring programs. Rather, these data should be construed as a first step in identifying the kinds of activities that are planned and are being implemented in AmeriCorps literacy tutoring programs.

Research on Effective Practices

What is known about the impacts on students of literacy services provided by AmeriCorps members or other volunteers? On one hand, educators and others believe that the use of volunteers to support student learning is valuable, and fosters improved learning outcomes

for children. The use of either one-on-one or small group tutoring of students is generally perceived as an effective means of providing instruction because lessons can be tailored to individual students' specific needs. Volunteer tutoring may be particularly useful for teachers who have large numbers of students in their classrooms, and who therefore are unable to provide the same level of individualized attention that a tutor can provide.

On the other hand, there are few large, well-controlled studies examining the effectiveness of school-based volunteer activities,[1] nor is there overwhelming evidence about the effectiveness of tutoring as a way to teach reading to students who are having difficulty.[2] However, in a review of several reading interventions, each of which includes a central tutoring component, reading researcher Barbara Wasik has identified a number of features or guidelines that may represent critical ingredients for an effective reading tutoring program.[3] At the same time, the America Reads initiative has also identified a similar set of features. The *Descriptive Survey* included items to assess program characteristics related to these effective practices described by Wasik and America Reads. It is important to note that there is not perfect correspondence between the features identified by Wasik and America Reads and those measured in the *Descriptive Survey*. The features specifically examined in the *Descriptive Survey* were:

- frequent and regular tutoring sessions;
- adequate intensity of tutoring (e.g., at least 1.5 hours per week);
- students and tutors meet in stable one-to-one pairs;
- tutors receive training before and during the period of tutoring activities;
- use of "brand name" instructional materials;
- program conducts a formal evaluation to assess tutoring effectiveness;
- reading specialists help plan tutoring activities; and
- coordination of instruction with the classroom program in reading.

These features will be used in this chapter to assess the degree to which AmeriCorps tutoring programs incorporate elements that research suggests are likely to produce positive reading outcomes.[4]

Characteristics of Tutoring Programs

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1 National Research Council (1990). Volunteers in Public Schools. B. Michael (Ed.). Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

2 Wasik, B. A. (1997). Volunteer tutoring programs: Do we know what works. Phi Delta Kappan, 79, 282-287. See also Wasik, B. A. (1998). Volunteer tutoring programs in reading: A review. Reading Research Quarterly, 33, 266-291.

3 Wasik, B. A. (1998). Using volunteers as reading tutors: Guidelines for successful practices. Reading Teacher, 51, 562-570.

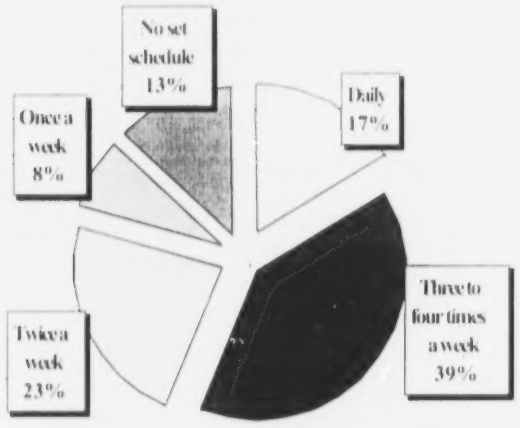
4 A number of other program features were identified by Wasik as important for positive reading outcomes. These features include: well-structured, carefully planned tutoring sessions; frequent assessment of students' progress; regular attendance by tutors and students; and fostering of positive, caring relationships among students, staff and tutors. Reliable information about these features is typically collected as part of an on-site observation rather than by questions on a survey completed by project directors.

Over three-quarters of programs provide tutoring in reading at least twice a week. More than two-thirds of programs (70 percent) provide students with tutoring for 1.5 hours per week or more, as recommended in the effective practices literature. In general, students receive more than two hours of tutoring in reading each week.

Frequency, Duration, and Intensity of Tutoring Sessions

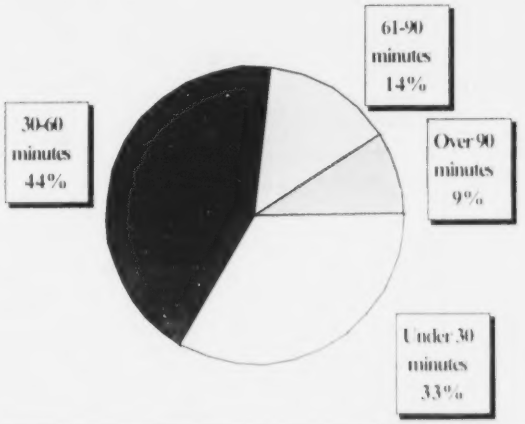
Frequent tutoring sessions are important in order to ensure continuity of learning and adequate exposure to reading materials. The majority of tutoring programs (56 percent) reported that students typically receive tutoring at least three to four times a week (Exhibit 4.1). Over three-quarters of programs (79 percent) provide tutoring at least twice a week, which is the minimum suggested by the literature for an effective tutoring program.

Exhibit 4.1 Number of Tutoring Sessions Per Week



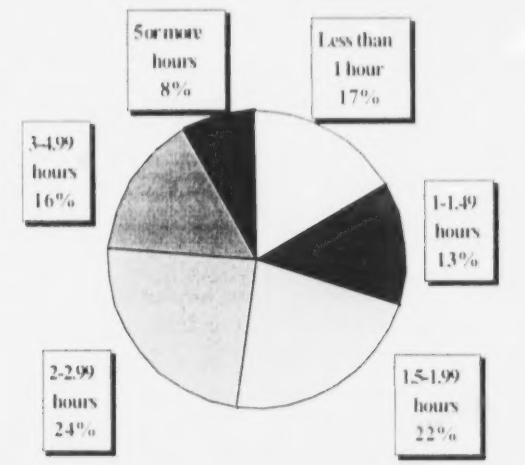
There is considerable variation in the duration of individual tutoring sessions, from less than a half-hour to more than one and a half hours (Exhibit 4.2). This variation is not surprising, given that the optimal length of a tutoring session may depend to a large degree on the age and reading skills of an individual student. Nevertheless, about two-thirds of the tutoring programs reported that in general, sessions last half an hour or longer.

Exhibit 4.2 Typical Duration of Tutoring Sessions



A measure of intensity of tutoring instruction (hours per week) can be computed by multiplying the number of sessions per week by the duration of each session. More than two-thirds of programs (70 percent) provide tutoring for 1.5 hours per week or more, as recommended in the effective practices literature (Exhibit 4.3). Moreover, almost half of the programs (48 percent) provide students with a minimum of two hours of tutoring in reading.

Exhibit 4.3 Intensity of Tutoring (hours per week)



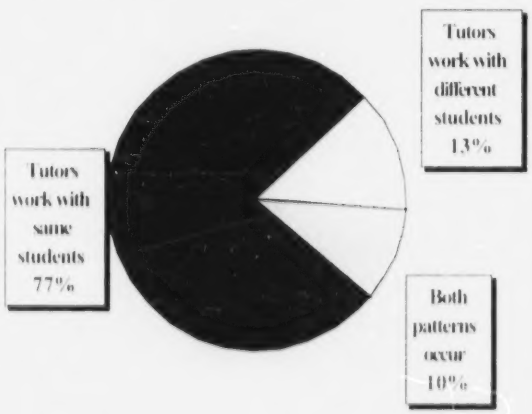
Students typically receive more than two hours a week of tutoring in reading.

Tutor-Student Consistency

Three-quarters of tutoring programs reported that tutors always worked with the same student or students across sessions.

There are a variety of ways in which tutors can provide instruction to students. One feature that varies across tutoring programs is whether tutors meet with the same students consistently from session to session (Exhibit 4.4). About three-quarters of programs (77 percent) reported that tutors always worked with the same student or students across sessions (not necessarily in one-to-one pairs). A substantially smaller proportion of programs (13 percent) reported that tutors see different students across sessions, and the remaining 10 percent of programs reported some combination of these two patterns.

Exhibit 4.4 Tutor-Student Consistency

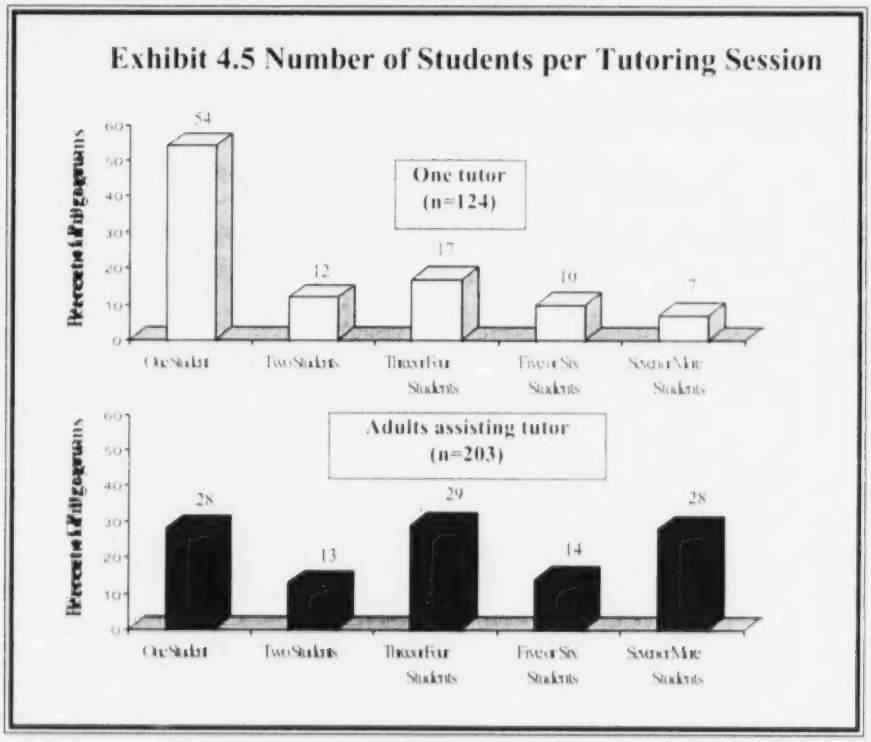


Student/tutor ratio

Stable one-to-one student/tutor pairs are used as the exclusive mode of tutoring by approximately one-quarter of tutoring programs.

The number of students meeting with tutors in a single session varies across tutoring programs. Tutors might work with one student individually, for example. However, if three or four students need assistance on a specific reading subskill, tutors may work with a small group. Further, in the majority of programs (62 percent), another adult assists the tutor in providing instruction. Using this approach, even more children may be tutored concurrently.

Exhibit 4.5 shows the distribution of tutoring programs in terms of the number of students who participate in a typical tutoring session. Separate data are presented for programs in which: 1) tutoring sessions led by a single tutor without additional adult help (n=124); and 2) tutors are assisted by other adults (n=203). Among the former, over half (54 percent) have sessions with only one student.[5] Among the latter, nearly three-quarters of the programs (72 percent) serve two or more students in a typical session.[6]



One-to-one tutoring has special appeal because it allows the tutor (perhaps with the help of the classroom teacher) to customize instruction to the specific needs of one student. Further advantage accrues when the one-to-one tutoring arrangement is stable, that is, the same tutor meets with the same student over a period of time. This allows students and tutors to forge a personal relationship that may enhance both the tutors' ability to assist students (because students' strengths and weaknesses are familiar to tutors), as well as students' motivation to excel (in order to please the tutors). Thus, stable one-to-one tutoring is perceived as a

[5] We assume that respondents interpreted a tutoring "session" as a discrete meeting between tutors and students, rather than the day's work for a single tutor, which may encompass several one-to-one meetings. If the latter interpretation was used by some respondents, then the number of programs where tutors work with single students may have been underestimated.

[6] Seventy-two percent represents the sum of percents for two students (13 percent), three or four students (29 percent), five or six students (14 percent), and seven or more students (28 percent).

particularly effective approach.[7] Stable one-to-one student/tutor pairs are used as the exclusive mode of tutoring by about one quarter of tutoring programs (27 percent).

Commonly used instructional models

Almost half of the programs with literacy tutoring activities reported that they employ a formal "brand name" instructional model.

There are a number of existing instructional models that have been developed for literacy tutoring. Some were developed with the intention of using certified teachers as tutors (e.g., *Reading Recovery*, *Success for All*) while others were explicitly designed with volunteers in mind (e.g., *Book Buddies*, *Reading One-to-One*). A discussion of the differences among these instructional models is beyond the scope of this report.[8] However, to summarize briefly, most of these models use a structured approach to tutoring, with specific prescriptions/recommendations for training and supervision of tutors, tutoring activities to be conducted during sessions, and often standardized books and/or instructional materials.

Exhibit 4.6 shows the instructional models used in AmeriCorps literacy tutoring programs. About half of the programs with literacy tutoring activities (47 percent) reported that they do not employ any formal "brand name" instructional model, and 27 percent of respondents reported using more than one model. The models cited most frequently included *Reading Recovery* and *Read*Write*Now* (16 percent each). Almost a third (30 percent) reported using a model other than those listed on the survey. These were generally less well-known or less common models (e.g., *Orton-Gillingham*, *Jump Start*); no more than a few programs reported using any particular one of these models.

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[7] Farkas, G. (1998). Reading One-to-One: An intensive program serving a great many students while still achieving large effects. In J. Crane (Ed.), Social Programs That Work, pp. 75-109. New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press.

[8] For a review of literacy tutoring programs, see Wasik, B. A., & Slavin, R. E. (1993). Preventing early reading failure with one-to-one tutoring: A review of five programs. Reading Research Quarterly, 28, 178-200; See also Wasik, B. A. (1997). Volunteer tutoring programs: Do we know what works? Phi Delta Kappan, 79, 282-287. See also Wasik, B. A. (1998). Volunteer tutoring programs in reading: A review. Reading Research Quarterly, 33, 266-291.

Exhibit 4.6
Commonly Used Instructional Models

Type of Model Used	Percent of Programs*
No Formal Model	47
Reading Recovery	16
*Read*Write*Now*	16
Reading One-to-One	12
Success for All	11
Book Buddies	9
Write-to-Read	7
Other	30

*Total can exceed 100 percent because programs can use multiple models

Other data available from the *Descriptive Survey* suggest that programs using the "brand name" instructional models may not adhere to all the program requirements as intended by the developers; instead, programs may adapt principles, materials, and methods from these models to meet their specific needs. For example, both *Reading Recovery* and *Success for All* require the use of certified reading teachers as tutors. It seems unlikely that the tutoring programs adhere to this guideline, as most volunteers are not certified reading teachers. Further, *Reading Recovery* features 30 minute tutoring sessions five times a week. Among the 56 programs citing this model, only 21 percent reported having tutoring sessions this frequently. Similar discrepancies were found for programs citing use of *Reading One-to-One* and *Success for All*. Therefore, programs that report using the models discussed in Exhibit 4.5 may not be following the instructional models as designed.

Tutoring activities

Working with real-life reading materials (rather than worksheets, flashcards, or other didactic materials) is a component of most tutoring programs.

Tutors engage in a wide range of activities with their students that can encompass the full range of reading subskills (e.g., reading aloud, reading comprehension, vocabulary development, reading fluency, decoding). The AmeriCorps literacy tutoring programs generally employed multiple tutoring activities and techniques (Exhibit 4.7). On average, respondents reported using 11 of the 17 activities listed. The three most frequently reported activities all involve interaction between tutors and students around stories or other written

materials (student reads to tutor while tutor monitors reading; tutor asks student comprehension and skill questions; student discusses story). This finding indicates that working with real-world reading materials (rather than worksheets, flashcards, or other didactic materials) is an important component of most tutoring programs.

Over half of the programs (55 percent) report that tutors conduct decoding activities with students (i.e., activities that help beginning readers develop sound-symbol correspondences). Although the majority of programs report engaging in this activity, a significant minority of programs may not be providing direct instruction in decoding, a skill that is clearly fundamental to the development of reading ability.[7] However, the proportion of programs providing explicit instruction in decoding skills may have been underestimated by the *Descriptive Study*, because respondents could have reported using other activities that encompass decoding instruction (e.g., flashcards, worksheets).

Exhibit 4.7
Tutoring Activities

Type of Tutoring Activity Used	Percent of Programs
Reads to tutor while tutor monitors reading	88
Tutor asks comprehension and skill questions	83
Discusses story (e.g., favorite part)	81
Vocabulary development	80
Tutor helps with homework	78
Student and tutor play word games	75
Tutor reads and student listens	74
Alphabet recognition and production	68
Writes about, illustrates or depicts a story	67
Word recognition	67
Works on concepts of print and reading readiness	65
Uses worksheets/ditto sheets/workbooks	64
Uses flashcards	63
Decodes (e.g., sound-symbol correspondence)	55
Takes book home/follow-up home activity	53
Listens to books on tape	24

Total can exceed 100 percent because programs can use multiple tutoring activities.

[7] National Research Council (1998). Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children. C. E. Snow, M. S. Burns, and P. Griffin (Eds.). Washington, D. C.: National Academy Press.

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Effective Tutoring Practices

Tutoring programs reported using an average of 4.6 out of 8 effective practices criteria that were examined. Over half of all programs meet 5 or more criteria.

In the previous sections, the individual characteristics of tutoring programs considered important for successful literacy outcomes have been described; next, these elements are considered in combination. Programmatic data were examined for the following eight criteria that correspond to the effective tutoring practices described earlier:

- *Frequency:* Two or more tutoring sessions a week.
- *Intensity:* At least 1.5 hours of tutoring per week.
- *Tutor-student configuration:* Students and tutors meet in stable one-to-one pairs.
- *Training:* Tutors receive training before and during the period of tutoring activities.[10]
- *Brand-name instructional model:* Program employs one of the following instructional models: Success For All, Howard Street Tutoring Model, Reading Recovery, Reading One-to-One, Book Buddies, Read*Write*Now, Write-to-Read, HIPPY, HOSTS, Reading Coaches.[11]
- *Evaluation:* Program conducts a formal evaluation to assess tutoring effectiveness.
- *Reading specialists:* Tutoring activities are planned in close coordination with reading specialists.[12]
- *Coordination with classroom:* Tutoring activities are aligned/coordinated with classroom activities.

A 'score' was computed for each program based on the total number of effective practices programs reported using. This score provides an estimate of programs' use of such practices. However, interpretations about effectiveness based on this score should be made with caution, for several reasons. First, the score is based on eight practices for which there is

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[10] An item concerning monitoring of service provision was considered for inclusion in the effective practices composite under the heading of training activities. However, because 96 percent of tutoring programs indicated that service provision was monitored in some way, this item did not help discriminate between programs, and was therefore removed from the composite.

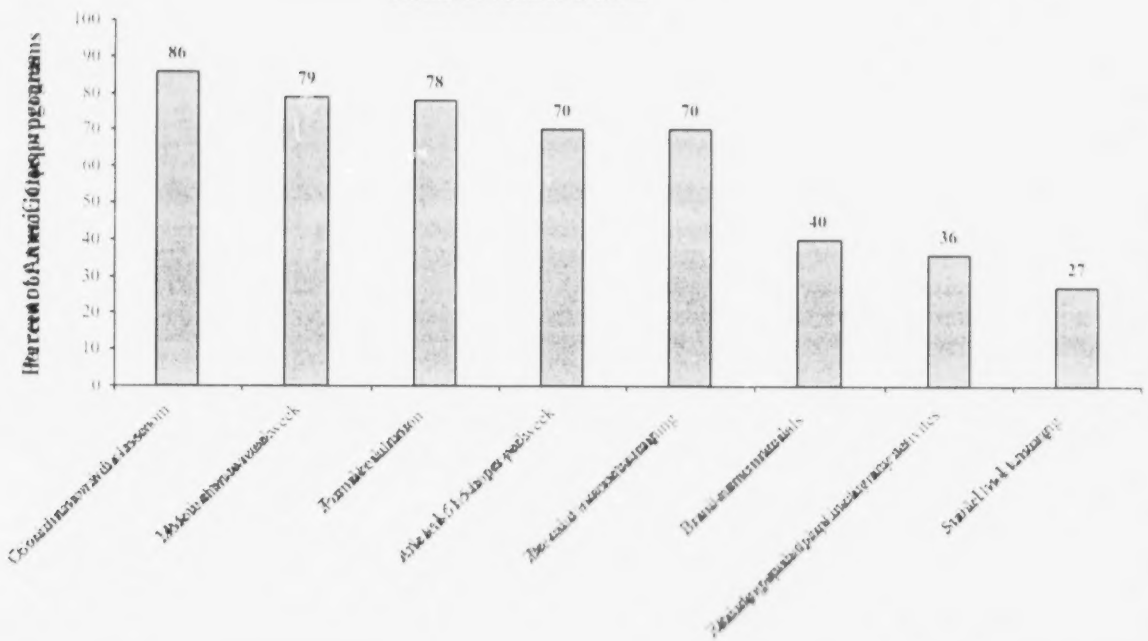
[11] Instructional models chosen for inclusion here included seven models that had been identified *a priori* as relevant (Success For All, Howard Street Tutoring Model, Reading Recovery, Reading One-to-One, Book Buddies, Read*Write*Now, Write-to-Read) and three others that were cited by at least five of the AmeriCorps tutoring programs (HIPPY, HOSTS, Reading Coaches).

[12] Wasik (1998) also suggests that another critical element is the use of reading specialists to *supervise tutors*. However, this information was not available in the *Descriptive Survey*, and was thus not included in the score.

information from the *Descriptive Survey*. This subset of effective practices is not an exhaustive list. Second, the information we have consists of responses to one, occasionally more, survey items. The data we have are not sufficient to support strong inferences about actual practice.[13] Third, the score is a simple sum -- each tutoring practice is equivalent to one point, for a potential total of 8. However, it is possible that certain practices are much more critical to producing favorable reading outcomes than others. For instance, it may be more important to provide tutoring in stable one-to-one pairs that it is to conduct a formal evaluation of the program. For these reasons, the computed score should be viewed as suggestive, in that it offers only a first glance at programs' overall use of effective tutoring practices.

The proportion of programs meeting each of the eight criteria is shown in Exhibit 4.8. Most programs reported that tutoring activities are conducted in coordination with the classroom (86 percent); the criterion met least often is stable one-to-one tutoring (27 percent). Programs meet an average of 4.6 out of 8 criteria. Over half of the programs meet 5 or more out of the 8 criteria (Exhibit 4.9). Only 4 percent, however, met all eight criteria.

Exhibit 4.8 Effective Tutoring Practices: Proportion of Programs Meeting Individual Effective Practices Criteria



[13] As an example, to satisfy the evaluation criterion, program directors had to report conducting a formal evaluation, but the nature of the evaluation (valid outcome measures, adequate comparison groups, etc.) was not specified or required to score a point on this element.

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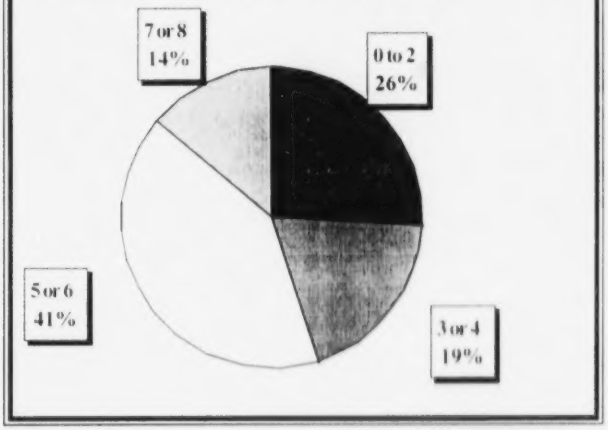
Exhibit 4.9 Effective Tutoring Practices: Number of Criteria Met By Programs



The use of effective tutoring practices by AmeriCorps programs varies by several program characteristics. As illustrated in Exhibit 4.10, several findings merit our attention. Programs sponsored by colleges, universities, or local education agencies appear to use more of this set of effective practices than do programs sponsored by other types of agencies. This may reflect greater access to, and familiarity with literacy-related research evidence and literacy practice. Tutoring programs receiving America Reads funds or having members supported by Federal Work Study funds also appear to use more effective tutoring practices. Lastly, programs that are more fully implemented report using effective practices to a greater extent than those programs not yet fully implemented. This may indicate that programs planned with effective practices in mind may have better resources to set their plans in motion. Although causal inferences concerning these variations cannot be made, they nevertheless suggest possible areas of inquiry for future research on program impact.

Exhibit 4.10
Average Number of Effective Practices by Program Type

Characteristic	Number of Programs	Mean Number of Effective Practices
Sponsoring Agency		
Non-profit organization	197	4.3
College or university	67	5.1
Local Education Agency/School district	40	4.9
Other state or local entity	45	4.5
Education is Primary Focus of Sponsoring Agency		
Yes	271	4.7
No	86	4.0
Receipt of America Reads Funds		
Yes	78	5.2
No	276	4.4
Other Funding Stream		
AmeriCorps only	301	4.6
Learn & Serve America	33	4.6
National Senior Service Corps	22	4.5
Level of Implementation (self-report)		
Low or partial	76	3.7
Moderate	185	4.7
Full	94	5.2
Some Members are Work Study Students		
Yes	58	5.3
No	291	4.4
Percent of Members Performing Literacy Activities		
High (>=70%)	221	4.8
Low (<=40%)	75	4.1

This review of theoretically effective tutoring practices suggests that the tutoring programs incorporate many features perceived by educators and researchers to be important for positive reading outcomes. At the same time, however, one particularly important tutoring characteristic, the use of stable student-tutor dyads, was employed less frequently than others, and this may be an important target for improvement.

Overall, the Corporation's efforts to encourage its AmeriCorps programs to develop and implement meaningful, potentially effective tutoring programs appear to be meeting with some success. At a minimum, these preliminary findings suggest that many programs, at least *as perceived by the directors*, are implementing potentially effective tutoring programs.

Appendix A

Survey Design and Implementation

In the summer of 1998 the Corporation contracted with Abt Associates Inc. to conduct a study of its AmeriCorps State*National programs to learn about the literacy services these programs provide to communities. In collaboration with Corporation staff, a survey instrument was designed (Appendix B). The survey collected three types of information about: 1) the sponsoring agencies ; 2) the AmeriCorps State*National programs conducting educational and literacy activities; and 3) the structures and operations of literacy component of the programs.

Prior to administering the survey to project directors, a field-test of the instrument was conducted. A draft of the survey was mailed to eight programs (recommended by the Corporation). Six programs responded and, based on their responses, items that the were confusing or unclear were revised. In addition, the draft was distributed to program officers at the Corporation for their review. In the final step, the Expert Panel reviewed the instrument and final revisions were made based on their comments.

In spring 1999, project directors were mailed a copy of the *Descriptive Survey*, accompanied by a letter indicating that they could respond either by completing the hard copy of the survey and returning it to Abt Associates, or by scheduling a phone interview to respond to the survey.

The following data describe several characteristics of the 481 agencies sponsoring AmeriCorps State/National programs in our study.

Exhibit C.1
Characteristics of 481 Sponsoring Agencies for AmeriCorps State/National Programs

Category	N	Percent
Type of Sponsoring Agency		
Non-profit organization	279	58
Local education agency/school district	120	25
State agency or statewide initiative	36	8
Other local agency/city/municipality	33	7
Other	13	3
Years in Operation for Sponsoring Agency		
More than five years	392	82
Four to five years	47	10
Two to three years	26	6
One year or less	11	2
Primary Focus for Sponsoring Agency †		
Education	340	71
Community development	139	29
Job training	90	19
Health/Safety	68	14
Parenting skills	61	13
Child care	59	12
Environment	46	10
Mental health	38	8
Food/Shelter/Other assistance	11	2
Housing	9	2
Agency Provided Education Services Prior to Receipt of any CNS Grant		
Yes	383	83
No	79	17

Exhibit C.1 (continued)

Characteristics of 481 Sponsoring Agencies for AmeriCorps State/National Programs

Category	N	Percent
Agency Used Volunteers Prior to Receipt of 1998-99 ASN Grant		
Yes, Corporation volunteers	52	12
Yes, Non-corporation volunteers	222	49
Yes, both kinds of volunteers	107	24
No	68	15
Years for Which ASN Grant Was Received †		
1994-1995	195	44
1995-1996	270	62
1996-1997	306	70
1997-1998	429	98
Years for Which Other Corporation Grants Were Received †		
1994-1995	39	10
1995-1996	51	13
1996-1997	77	19
1997-1998	87	21
Areas of Need addressed by 1998-99 ASN Program †		
Education	436	92
Environment	105	22
Public safety	103	22
Other human needs	215	45

† Respondents could select more than one response; therefore percentages do not sum to 100.

Exhibit C.1 (continued)

Characteristics of 481 Sponsoring Agencies for AmeriCorps State/National Programs

Educational Services Provided by 481 ASN Programs	N	Percent
Any literacy or other educational services	406	84
Tutoring children (toddler through 17 years of age) in reading	353	73
Tutoring children in math	289	60
Tutoring children in subjects other than reading or math	267	56
Tutoring adults, parents, or family members in reading	109	23
Tutoring adults, parents, or family members in math	71	15
Tutoring adult, parents or family members in subjects other than reading or math	94	20
Providing reading coaches	173	36
Providing homework assistance	319	66
Providing academic mentoring	278	58
Providing classroom assistance	285	59
Helping parents/family members to engage in literacy activities with their children	195	41
Providing instruction in the English language (ESL)	128	27
Serving as an interpreter for children not fluent in English	103	21
Helping children reading to adults	115	24
Sponsoring trips to the library	181	38
Distributing books	207	43
Reading to children	305	63
Developing / preparing instructional materials	265	55
Organizing activities to increase children's motivation to read (e.g. contests for the most books read)	253	53
Recruiting volunteers to tutor children or adults in literacy	155	53
Supervising the literacy activities of volunteers	190	40
Classroom teaching	3	1
Other educational or literacy services	32	7

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is the final product of the Descriptive Study of the AmeriCorps*State /National Literacy Programs, prepared by Abt Associates for the Corporation for National Service's Office of Evaluation under Task Order Number 2, Contract Number 97-743-1004. The report provides detailed descriptive information about the literacy activities conducted by these programs.

The report represents substantial contributions from many individuals during the course of the evaluation. Most importantly, the authors of this report--Marc Moss, Jordan Hiller, and Douglas Moore--gratefully acknowledge the participation and input of the 481 AmeriCorps*State/National Program Directors who participated in the study. We thank them for their contributions of time and information.

The authors wish to thank several other important contributors to the report. Throughout the evaluation, the Corporation for National Service provided valuable guidance to the evaluation contractors. Special thanks are due to Susan Labin, the Corporation's Task Manager for this study; she provided very useful feedback on all phases of the study. In addition, the Technical Experts George Farkas, Nancy Karweit and Barbara Wasik provided valuable guidance on the reading research on tutoring programs and on the design of the survey instrument.

Key staff from Abt Associates include Brenda Rodriguez, who directed the data collection and obtained a very high response rate (93 percent); Beth Gamse, who provided editorial advice; Janet Schwartz, who thoughtfully reviewed earlier versions of the report; and Debra Thebearge, who unfailingly provided tireless secretarial support.